

URBAN COYOTES

TOLERANCE

Coyotes have survived the incursion by man into their territory and thrived. They have adapted to man's technology, new strategies, new tools, extensive eradication programs and resources. Humans need to learn to accept the Coyotes as a natural part of the environment and take the necessary precautions to insure there is a check and balance for both man and animal. Respect the Coyote's need to live and in turn the Coyote will respect the limitations we impose.



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GENERAL INFORMATION

The Coyote (*Canis latrans*) is found throughout most of California, ranging from the low desert and valley areas to the highest mountain elevations. Often called the "little wolf," the Coyote resembles a medium sized shepherd type dog but has large erect ears, a narrow muzzle and yellow eyes. The tail is round and bushy and is carried straight out below the back. The Coyote coloration varies from grayish, tawny brown with a black tip on the tail in the low desert and valley areas to gray with white under parts in the highest elevations. The Coyote has a large brain and has an exceptional sense of smell, vision and hearing.

HABITS

The Coyote is most active at dusk, night and predawn and has a distinctive vocalization, which consists of various howls, high quivering cries and crazy high pitched yapping. There are two howling seasons, January/February when breeding season starts and September/October when females are calling to their pups. Pups are ready to hunt on their own in the fall of the year of their birth and will relocate 5 to 10 miles from their parents range. The mortality for juvenile Coyotes is 50% to 70% and adults typically live 3-5 years. It is estimated 30% to 50% of the adult population dies each year and Coyotes compensate by breeding younger and having larger litters.

The Coyote's range varied from 3 to 30 square miles, but where the Coyotes are numerous, the home range becomes smaller as competition for food, water and shelter becomes a prime factor on setting limitations. The absence of prey will also factor into a smaller litter size and fewer females will breed when there is a scarcity of food.

Coyotes are opportunistic carnivores or equal opportunity eaters, taking the easiest meal available, which includes meat, fish, poultry, vegetables, fruit, insects, rodents, and reptiles. The food need not be fresh and the Coyote is happy to feed on carrion. A varied diet allows the Coyote to exist on whatever the area offers in the way of food, be it trash from a dumpster, pet food, pets themselves or natural prey.

The Coyote's sense of smell, vision and hearing, when coupled with evasiveness, enables them to survive both in the wild and occasionally in suburban areas of some of California's largest cities. They are common in most rural areas, but because of their secretive nature, few are seen.



As the Coyote finds urban areas easy pickings, they lose their fear of humans and become bolder. Efforts to control or exterminate the coyote by predator control agencies have produced an animal that is extremely alert and wary and well able to maintain itself.

PROBLEMS

As the Coyote loses its wariness of man, the Coyote becomes a risk to the health and safety of the public. In 1984, a three-year-old girl was attacked and killed by Coyotes in Southern California. In 1996, a woman from Benkleman, Nebraska was attacked and bitten by a Coyote while jogging on a high school track. Though attacks on people are rare, not so is the attack on domestic pets.

The Coyote can carry rabies and Tularemia, diseases that can be transmitted to man and domestic pets. Specific canine diseases such as distemper and canine hepatitis can travel both ways, putting both Coyote and pet at risk. Parasites that are carried by Coyotes include mites, ticks, fleas, worms and flukes. Heartworm is the most important endoparasite in California's Coyote population and can be transmitted to domestic dogs by mosquitoes. The interactions between man and Coyote, through his own action and those of his pets, spell potential problems for the public and Coyote.

METHODS OF CONTROL

There is no simple permanent solution to control Coyotes. On-going prevention methods to reduce the Coyote population or eliminate it entirely in areas has proven futile. The Coyote population finds a way to survive and it becomes apparent, the human population will need to adopt as well. In learning to cope with this animal through short-term and long term methods, a balance can be achieved so both may live together.

Short-term methods of controlling the Coyote population include harassment, trapping and shooting. Harassing a problem Coyote has a limited value. Soon the Coyote realizes that having things thrown at him, chasing him off or shooting at him has no lasting consequences. The Coyote has learned he will not be harmed and becomes colder in his contact with people. The Coyote must relearn to respect the limitations of coexistence established by man.

Trapping and snaring Coyotes is difficult. Box traps are ineffective with the Coyotes keen sense of smell. The animal will not enter a box trap because of the smell of humans. Only the inexperienced Coyote, such as a pup, will venture into the trap along with domestic dogs. A snare is set usually in a location where the Coyotes frequently pass, such as a gap under a fence. Coyotes prefer to go under an obstruction rather than over the top. Leg traps are spring jaw traps designed to catch the animal's leg when he steps into the trap. California laws prohibit certain types of leg traps that cause injury to the animal. Instead, offset jaw traps are used with minimal discomfort to the trapped animal. Some traps are padded to even further prevent the possibility of injury. These traps are set and monitored by professional trappers or members of the Federal Animal Damage Control team.

Once the animal is trapped, the next problem is what to do with the Coyote. Relocation has been found to be unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. Studies by the US Department of Wildlife have shown the survival rate of relocate animals is small. These animals when released into an unfamiliar environment find they are in direct competition with another animal's territory. They do not know where to find water and many times fall victim to diseases transmitted from their contact with man. The California Department of Fish and Game's philosophy states the release of a problem animal to another area just moves the problem, and makes it someone else's problem. This is not a solution.

Shooting Coyotes is a short-term solution to the problem. While a quick fix, other Coyotes soon replace the Coyotes that are eliminated. This method and leg tapping is useful for eliminating the one or two problem Coyotes within a population. The Humane Society of the United States acknowledges the need to eliminate these problem animals, which can jeopardize the health and safety of humans before we can achieve long-term results.

As stated before, there is no simple permanent method for the control of Coyotes. If the community as a whole is having problems with Coyotes, the environment is offering the Coyote the perfect opportunity to interact with others of their own species to socialize and reproduce. Controlling Coyotes means not eliminating the Coyotes, but eliminating the element in the environment that makes the Coyote want to stay.

Long-term control rests with the community and the individual. Once the problem animals are removed by short-term methods, steps must be taken by the community to make the environment undesirable for Coyotes.

Exclusion is a term that means physically preventing the animals from entering an area where the Coyote can get food, water or shelter. Fences or barriers are erected and should be 5 ½ feet tall. Coyotes are very adept diggers and prefer to dig under an obstacle rather than jump them, so the bottom should be buried. Locating potential dens and putting barriers in front of them will exclude the females from establishing a den. Brush and vegetation should be cleared from backyards to eliminate habitat for the prey that the Coyote feeds upon. Landscaping should be pruned on a regular basis to remove hiding cover where the Coyote can stalk domestic pets.

If pets are fed outside, it should be under direct supervision so no food is left out overnight. **NEVER** leave food out for Coyotes and **NEVER** feed them by hand. Make sure your pet's vaccinations are current for rabies and distemper and keep pets indoors at night. Water bowls should be emptied and not left out after dark. Trash cans should be high quality to prevent any wild animals from opening them. If possible secure trash receptacles in an enclosed structure.